

# THE ARCHAEOBOTANY OF MIKULČICE

Food Supply to the Early Medieval Stronghold

Michaela Látková

ARCHEOLOGICKÝ ÚSTAV AV ČR, BRNO

**The Archaeobotany of Mikulčice  
Food Supply to the Early Medieval Stronghold**

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Lumír Poláček und Pavel Kouřil

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Umschlagbild vorn  
*Panicum miliaceum*, millet, Hirse

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*This paper is dedicated to the memory of Renáta Látková*

## EDITORS' FOREWORD

The 11th volume in the SBM - Studien zum Burgwall von Mikulčice - series returns to archaeobotanical issues. This volume draws on the nowadays classic research by Emanuel Opravil, published in SBM volumes 3 through 5. Unlike the “original” stage of Mikulčice archaeobotany associated with E. Opravil, which evaluates finds from a closed stage of large-scale open area excavations in Mikulčice from 1954-1992, the “new” stage, represented in this book by Michaela Látková, is based on the results of modern excavations conducted in Mikulčice in recent years. Geographically, this work includes the whole territory of the early medieval agglomeration including the Slovak (Kopčany) part of the monument area, which is in line with the modern concept of the Mikulčice research.

Thanks to a thorough stratification of the finds, and in particular to the new unified methodology of sampling and the separation and evaluation of samples, the results of our new archaeobotanical research are key elements in the reconstruction of the economic conditions in the early medieval agglomeration. The presented results are groundbreaking in a way - in some respects even contradictory to the archaeological findings so far - which is why a valuable specialised discussion concerning the newly presented subsistence models can be expected. The present work asks specific questions relevant to today's interdisciplinary research into Mikulčice, particularly its economic and environmental activities. At the same time, it contributes to the highly topical subject of the current Moravian and Central European medieval studies: the knowledge of the economic foundations of Great Moravia and its power centres.

Thanks to the erudition of the author, we have a useful archaeobotanical analysis of the latest archaeological excavations in Mikulčice and Kopčany. Thus, Mikulčice is once again at the forefront of archaeobotanical research in Moravia. This volume is the first tangible output of the newly established archaeobotanical workplace in Mikulčice, part of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Brno.

The 11th volume opens a new phase of the publishing series Studien zum Burgwall von Mikulčice. First of all, it has a new graphic style. There is a trend set by volumes 9 and 10: the content of the individual publications is becoming more independent - apart from several contributions with similar topics, the SBM books will be in the form of monographs. The basic principle - the publication in a language accessible to the international community - remains; it will always be adapted to the specific focus of the future publications (German, English and so on).

This book is published thanks to the financial support of the Editorial Board of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, to whom we would like to express our gratitude.

## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

This study began as a dissertation thesis, which was defended in 2015 at the Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (Slovakia), which is why my greatest appreciation goes to my consultant, Doc. Mária Hajnalová, PhD. I am grateful for her invaluable assistance, expert advice and critical remarks during the writing process. Without her support and initiative, this paper would have never come into being.

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# 1 Introduction

One of the most frequently discussed questions concerning research into Early-Medieval central settlements in Central Europe is regarding (paleo)economy - the supply of crop-based food and the level of the centres' dependency on smaller neighbouring communities.<sup>1</sup> The question of the exploitation and the economic use of river floodplains is a fundamental issue raised by archaeological research into the Great Moravian lowland strongholds (POLÁČEK 2001, 363-364).<sup>2</sup>

The food supply at one of the most important Early-Medieval centres is evaluated in this study along with a more detailed localising and characterisation of its economic and agricultural hinterland. The purpose of this study is to reconstruct the centre's subsistence strategy using identification crop husbandry regimes and how the landscape was used as an economic hinterland. Research into such a broad issue should be based on various methodological approaches to the reconstruction of a living culture, where archaeobotany - which evaluates direct evidence of economic activities - holds an undisputed position.

The main tool to fulfil the aim of the present study is an archaeological analysis of the plant macroremains (PMR) retrieved from archaeological sediments at the Mikulčice and Kopčany sites. Plant macroremains from the time horizon of the 9th to the 10th centuries were evaluated and interpreted. These were obtained over the past few years during the excavation of 16 sites located in both

parts of the agglomerations, both on the Slovak (BAXA 2010; BAXA et al. 2008; KRASKOVSKÁ 1965, 1969) and Czech banks of the River Morava (POLÁČEK et al. 2013, 2014; HLADÍK/POLÁČEK 2014; MAZUCH 2013b; POLÁČEK/ŠKOJEC 2011; POLÁČEK/ŠKOJEC 2012; HLADÍK 2009).

The Mikulčice-Kopčany settlement agglomeration is currently one of the most important Great Moravian centres. The Mikulčice agglomeration consists of two fortified areas (the acropolis and the fortified outer bailey) and a larger non-fortified area, marked as a suburbium/extramural settlement. Smaller villages are concentrated in the neighbourhoods of the agglomeration, which are better archaeologically excavated, particularly on the left bank of the Morava River although they are also present on the Slovak side. In the past, the stream and the character of the river have been changing and today it is still unknown exactly where the main water course flowed. However, it is likely that the Mikulčice and Kopčany sites were agglomerated during the Great Moravia period. Situated in this area of the agglomeration are the remains of the 12 sacral structures with bricked walls; however, the existence of the three churches (1, 11 and 12) is only on a hypothetical level. On the right river bank is the still standing so-called "13th church of Mikulčice" - the Church of St Margaret of Antioch in Kopčany. All these churches are located in a fortified area (acropolis) and also in non-fortified parts of the suburbium. With the exception of the numerous sacral structures, there is also a secular mural building - a palace. The extremely high concentration of mural structures and the numerous collections of findings (created during the 1960s when there were intensive archaeological excavations) point to the significant character of Mikulčice being mainly in the Church sphere and its organization during the Great Moravia period, as well as to the great political authority concentrated there (POLÁČEK 2006).

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1 KLANICA 1987; POLÁČEK 2008a; DRESLER/MACHÁČEK 2008; MAŘÍK 2009; HLADÍK 2014; DRESLEROVÁ et al. 2013.

2 The main project worked on in Mikulčice in the years 1996-2001 was the "Sídlní aglomerace velkomoravských mocenských center v proměnách údolní nivy" (Settlement Agglomeration of Great Moravian Power Centres and the Changes of the Valley Meadow) funded by the Czech Science Foundation.

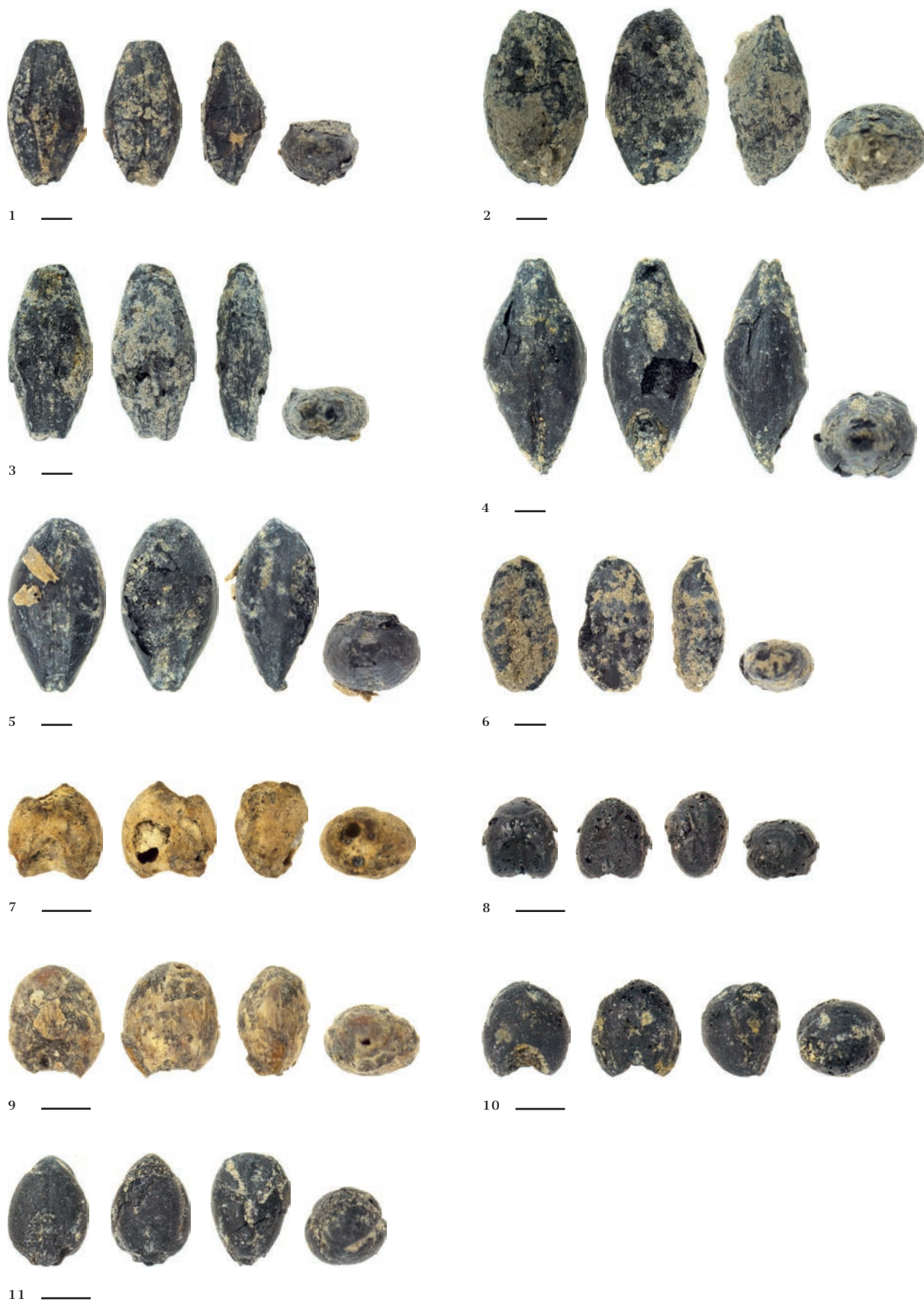


PLATE 1 | Mikulčice-Kopčany. Finds of cultivated crops: cereals, 1-5 - *Hordeum vulgare-vulgare*, 6 - *Hordeum vulgare - coeleste*, 7-11 - *Panicum miliaceum*. Scale 1 mm.

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